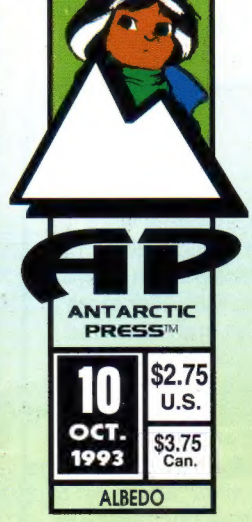
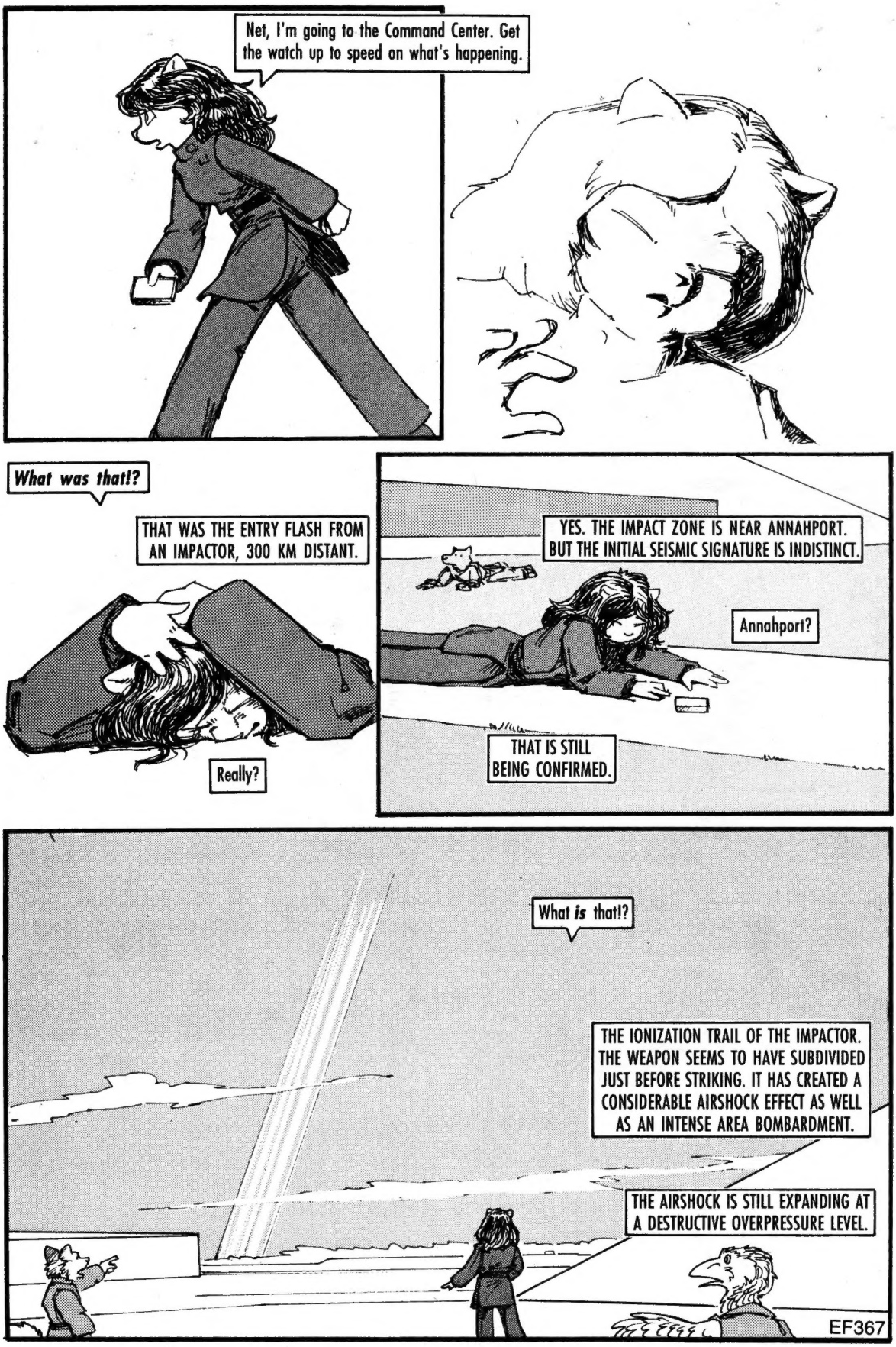
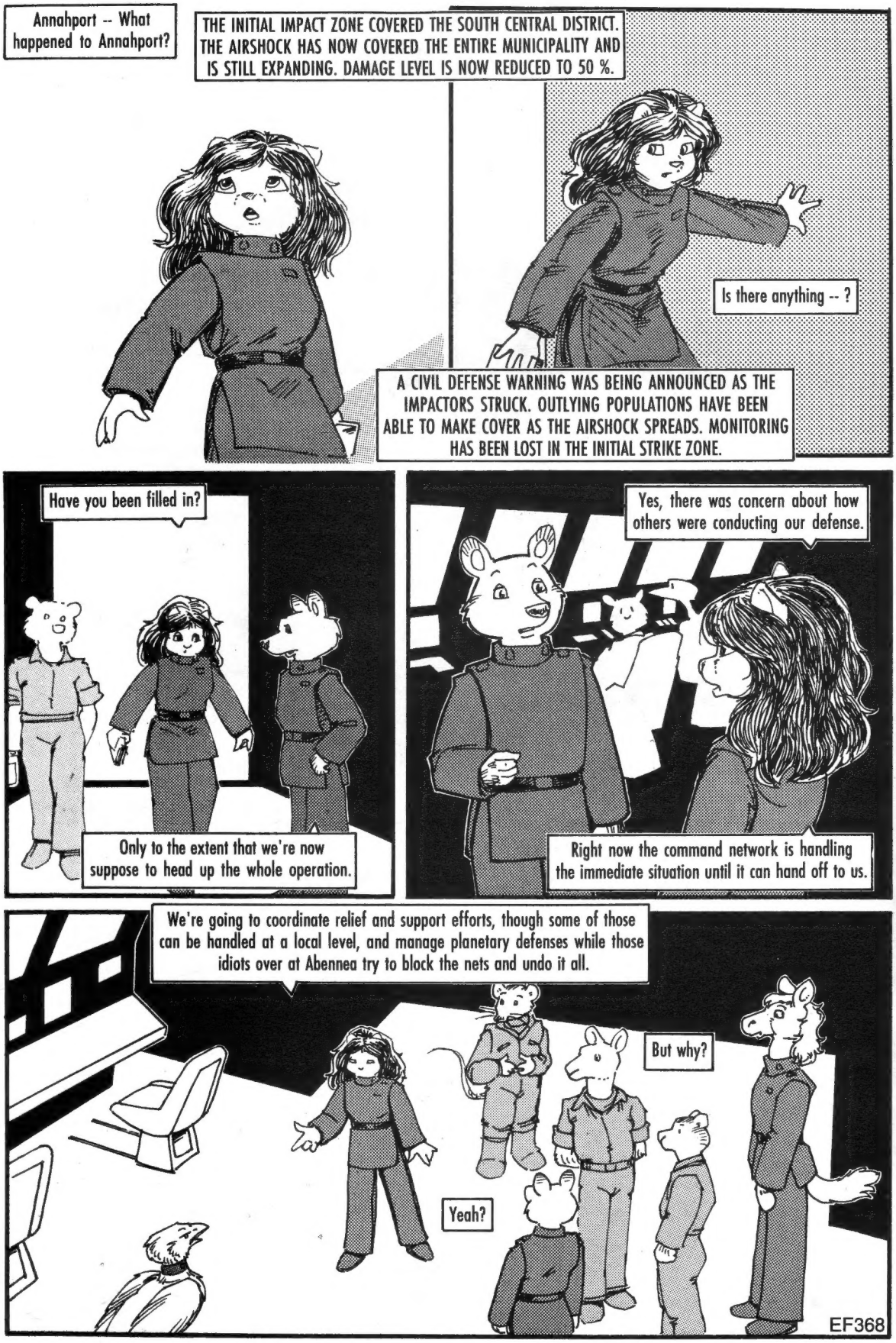
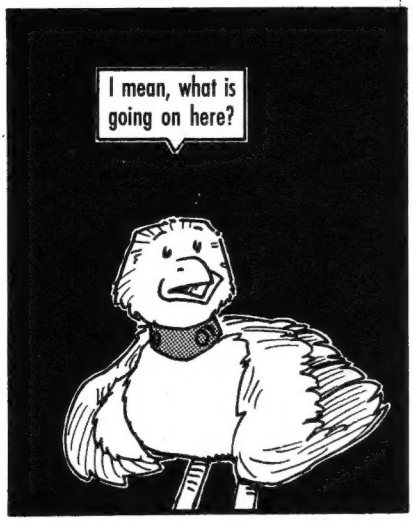


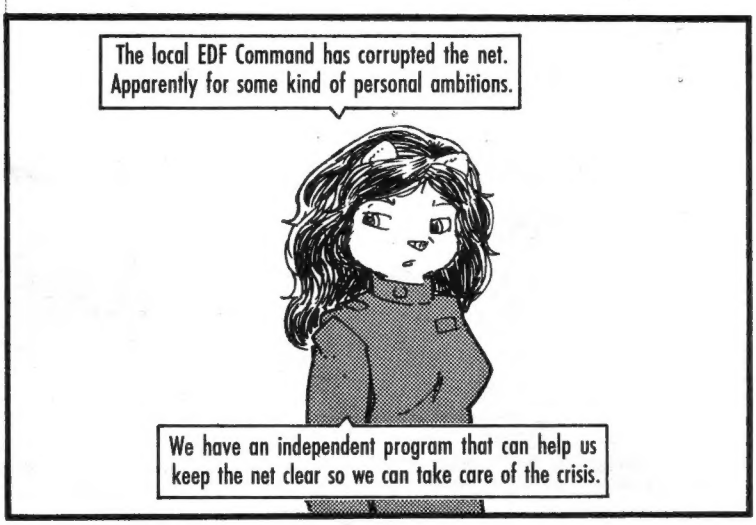
ALBEDO
ANTHROPOMORPHICS

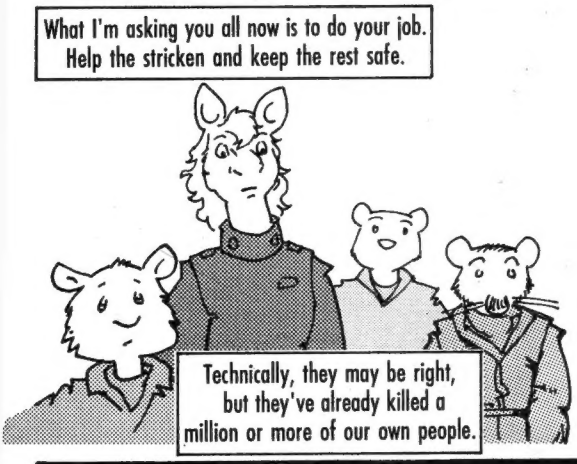
S A GALLASSI 93

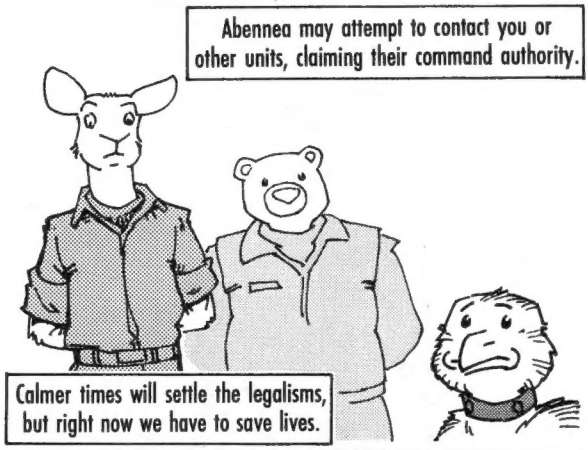

Net, I'm going to the Command Center. Get the watch up to speed on what's happening.
What was that!?
THAT WAS THE ENTRY FLASH FROM AN IMPACTOR, 300 KM DISTANT.
Really?
YES. THE IMPACT ZONE IS NEAR ANNAHPORT. BUT THE INITIAL SEISMIC SIGNATURE IS INDISTINCT.
Annahport?
THAT IS STILL BEING CONFIRMED.
What is that!?
THE IONIZATION TRAIL OF THE IMPACTOR. THE WEAPON SEEMS TO HAVE SUBDIVIDED JUST BEFORE STRIKING. IT HAS CREATED A CONSIDERABLE AIRSHOCK EFFECT AS WELL AS AN INTENSE AREA BOMBARDMENT.
THE AIRSHOCK IS STILL EXPANDING AT A DESTRUCTIVE OVERPRESSURE LEVEL.
EF367


Annahport -- What happened to Annahport?
THE INITIAL IMPACT ZONE COVERED THE SOUTH CENTRAL DISTRICT. THE AIRSHOCK HAS NOW COVERED THE ENTIRE MUNICIPALITY AND IS STILL EXPANDING. DAMAGE LEVEL IS NOW REDUCED TO 50 %.
Is there anything -- ?
A CIVIL DEFENSE WARNING WAS BEING ANNOUNCED AS THE IMPACTORS STRUCK. OUTLYING POPULATIONS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MAKE COVER AS THE AIRSHOCK SPREADS. MONITORING HAS BEEN LOST IN THE INITIAL STRIKE ZONE.
Have you been filled in?
Only to the extent that we're now suppose to head up the whole operation.
Yes, there was concern about how others were conducting our defense.
Right now the command network is handling the immediate situation until it can hand off to us.
We're going to coordinate relief and support efforts, though some of those can be handled at a local level, and manage planetary defenses while those idiots over at Abennea try to block the nets and undo it all.
But why?
Yeah?
EF368

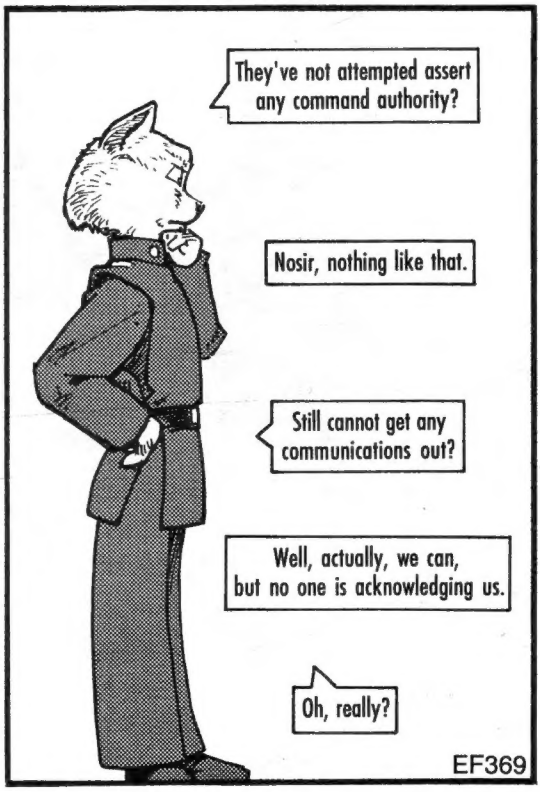

I mean, what is going on here?

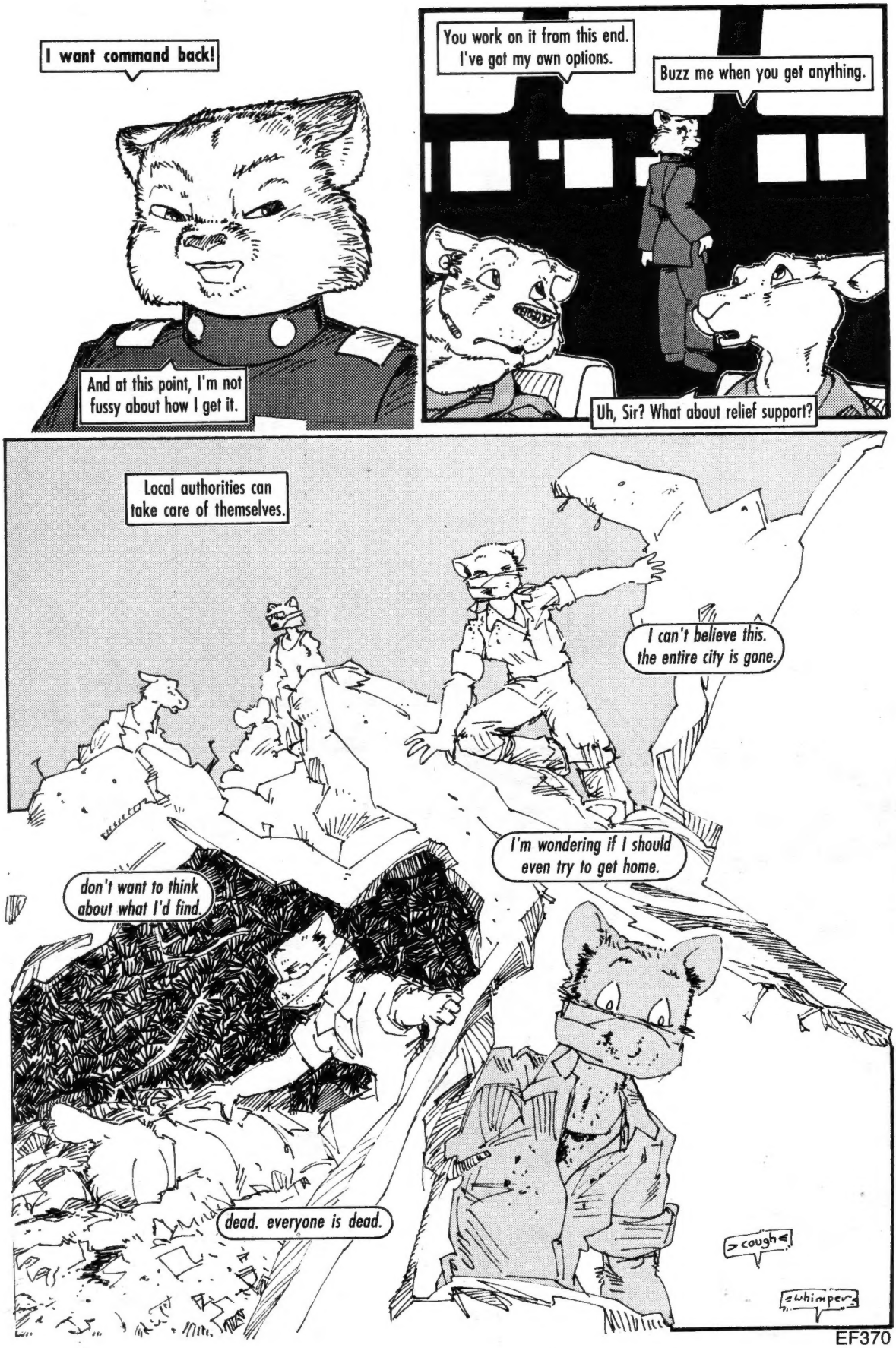

The local EDF Command has corrupted the net. Apparently for some kind of personal ambitions.
We have an independent program that can help us keep the net clear so we can take care of the crisis.


What I'm asking you all now is to do your job. Help the stricken and keep the rest safe.
Technically, they may be right, but they've already killed a million or more of our own people.


Abennea may attempt to contact you or other units, claiming their command authority.
Calmer times will settle the legalisms, but right now we have to save lives.

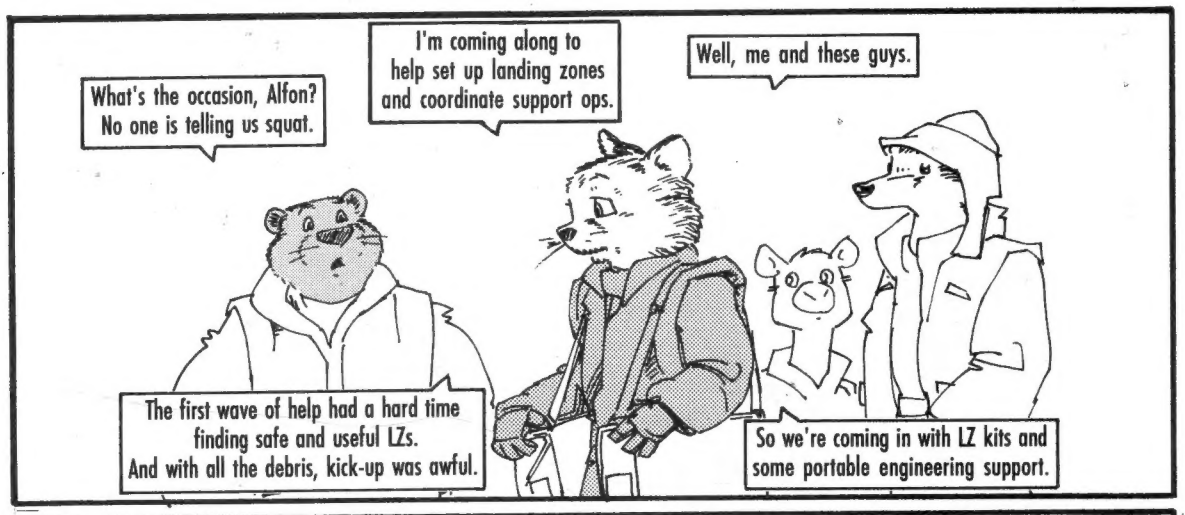
So, what are they doing now?
Well, sir, as you can see, they're lining up some ACVs for intercept and have mobilized some relief for the stricken areas.

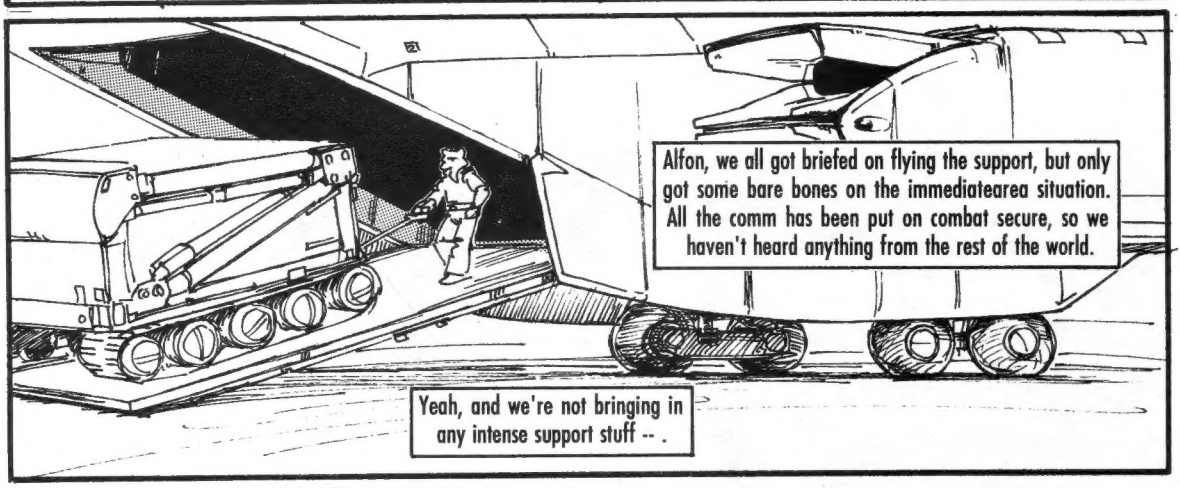

They've not attempted assert any command authority?
Nosir, nothing like that.
Still cannot get any communications out?
Well, actually, we can, but no one is acknowledging us.
Oh, really?

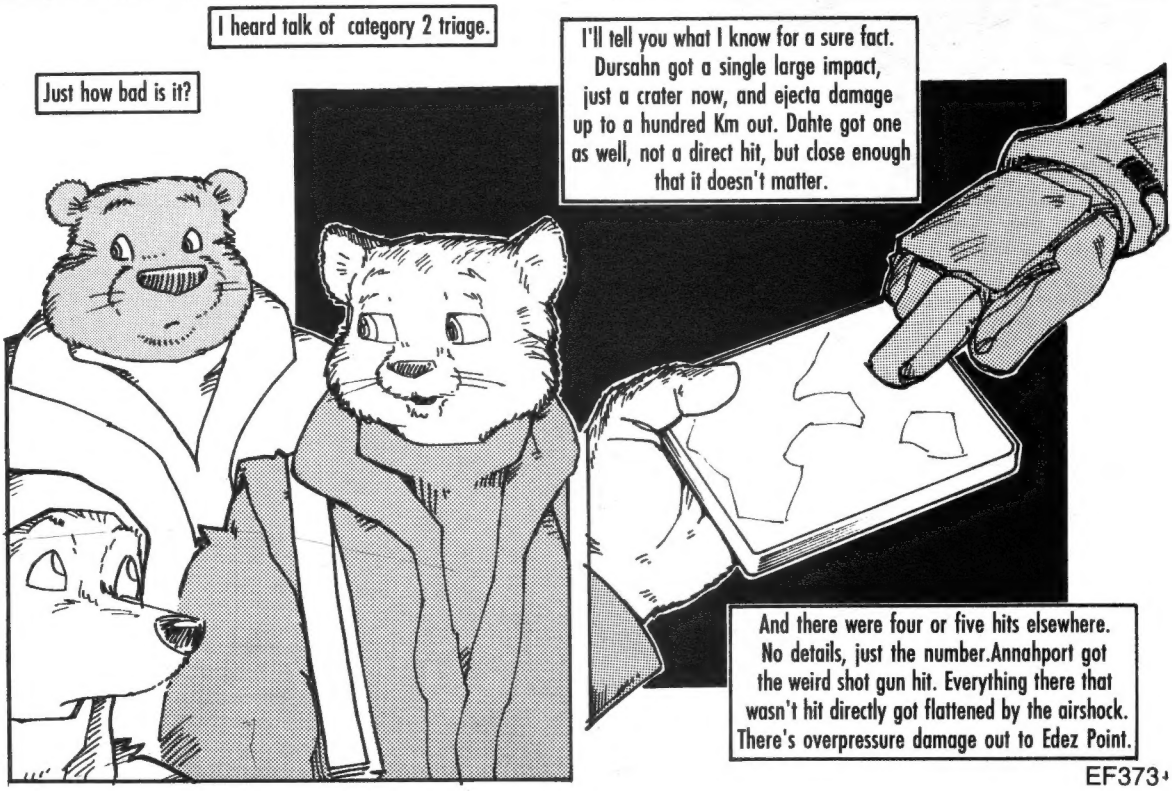

I want command back!
And at this point, I'm not fussy about how I get it.
You work on it from this end. I've got my own options.
Buzz me when you get anything.
Uh, Sir? What about relief support?
Local authorities can take care of themselves.
I can't believe this. the entire city is gone.
I'm wondering if I should even try to get home.
don't want to think about what I'd find.
dead. everyone is dead.
cough
whimpers

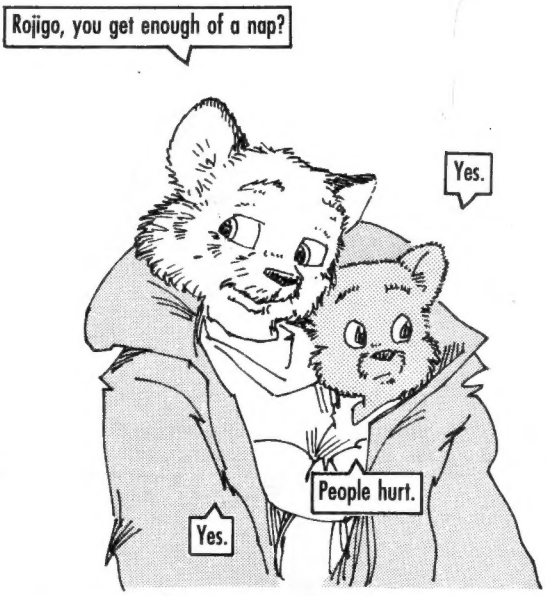
Hi there, little guy.
hurt
mommy?
I'm afraid your mommy isn't available.
what an irony, it's a rabbit
ears hurt.
Everybody's ears hurt around here.
We'd better find you some help.
Hey, there's a ship coming in. They ought to have an aid center.
That a rescue ship?
Looks like it.
Whatchadoin' with that?
I'm a member of the Homeguard, rescuing a citizen. You have a problem with that?
If not, let me past.
Now, we'll find some help.
3F371

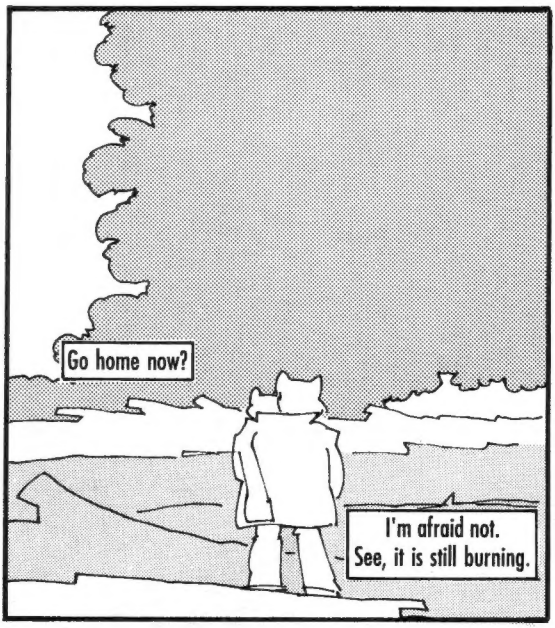
Where's the med service?
Med service?
That bastard just dropped off some emergency rations and first aid kits, then took off.
There's no one in charge here?
Does it look like it?
You're right.
Listen up!
The whole city is like this, so there is no quick help coming. That means we 'll have to take care of ourselves.
Anyone with a workable handset, especially one with a printer, get the names of everyone here.
And see if you can get a map of the neighborhood.
You guys with the bodies, do you know who they are?
Note where everyone, living or dead, has come from.
Put hardcopies in with every DB, ID if you know for sure, and a location description.
EF372

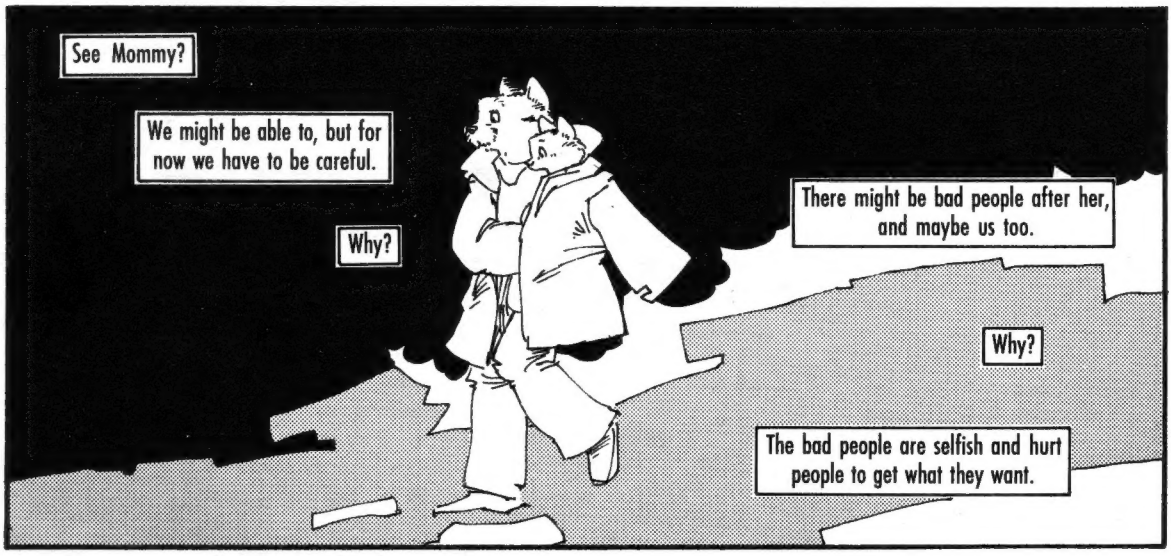

What's the occasion, Alfon? No one is telling us squat.
I'm coming along to help set up landing zones and coordinate support ops.
Well, me and these guys.
The first wave of help had a hard time finding safe and useful LZs. And with all the debris, kick-up was awful.
So we're coming in with LZ kits and some portable engineering support.

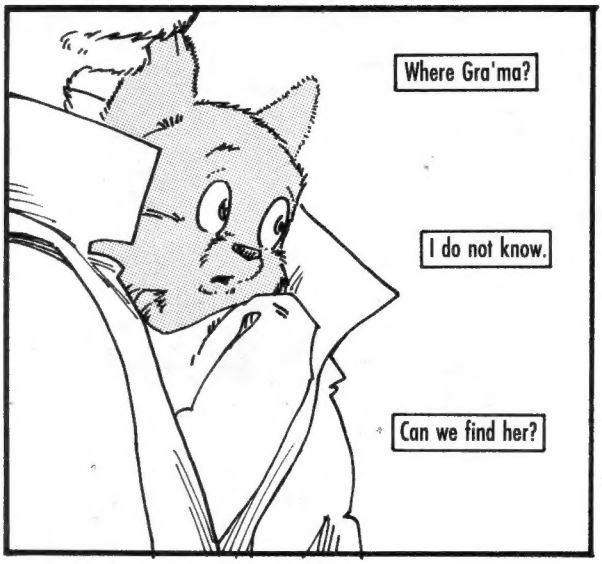

Alfon, we all got briefed on flying the support, but only got some bare bones on the immediatearea situation. All the comm has been put on combat secure, so we haven't heard anything from the rest of the world.
Yeah, and we're not bringing in any intense support stuff -- .


I heard talk of category 2 triage.
Just how bad is it?
I'll tell you what I know for a sure fact. Dursahn got a single large impact, just a crater now, and ejecta damage up to a hundred Km out. Dahte got one as well, not a direct hit, but close enough that it doesn't matter.
And there were four or five hits elsewhere. No details, just the number.Annahport got the weird shot gun hit. Everything there that wasn't hit directly got flattened by the airshock. There's overpressure damage out to Edez Point.


Rojigo, you get enough of a nap?
Yes.
People hurt.
Yes.


Go home now?
I'm afraid not.
See, it is still burning.


See Mommy?
We might be able to, but for now we have to be careful.
Why?
There might be bad people after her, and maybe us too.
Why?
The bad people are selfish and hurt people to get what they want.


Where Gra'ma?
I do not know.
Can we find her?

We have to hide from the bad people first.
If we hide real well for a while, then we can look for your Mommy and Gra'ma.

Computer, what is our immediate battle plan?

TO CLOSE-APPROACH DORNTHANT II.

I mean specific evasion tactics and the like, so I can handle systems demands.

NO, SIR. THAT IS THE ONLY MANEUVERING PROGRAM I HAVE FOR THIS OPERATION.

Does the Captain have ***any*** plan?

NO, SIR.

Connect me with --

No.

Computer, does our mission provide for evasive action? Or more important, is there some strategic plan that requires us to go straight in?

NO. THE MISSION ORDERS ONLY REQUIRE THE ARRIVAL TIME.

Computer, assemble attack maneuver options that will give us some chance of survival.

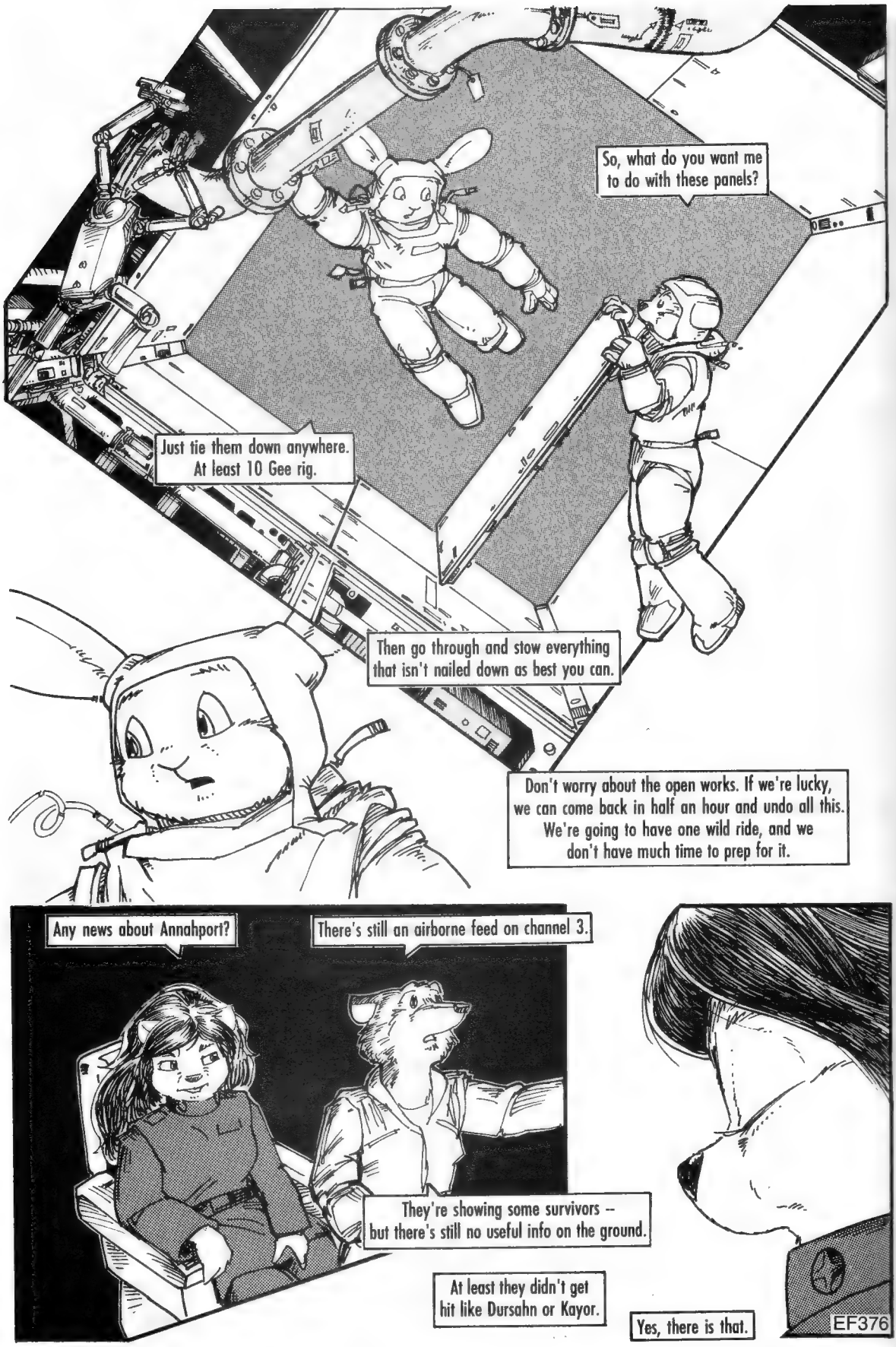
YOU WILL HAVE TO BE SPECIFIC ABOUT WHAT LEVEL OF SURVIVAL.

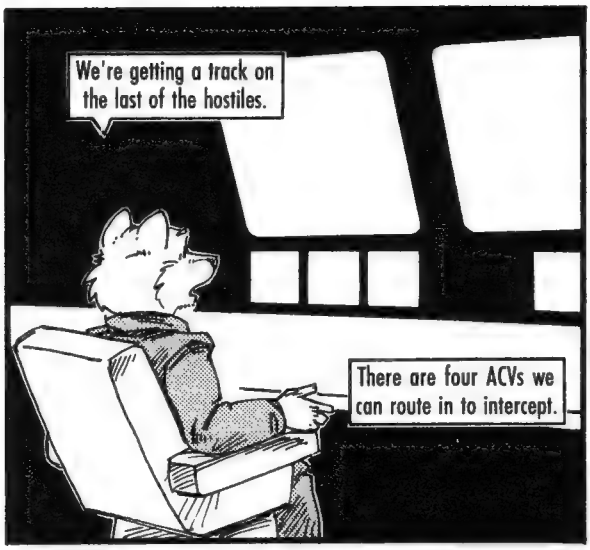
Yes, of course.

The only restrictions are that we'll need enough consumables for a worst-case skip jump out of EDF space.

YOU WILL NEED TO RECONFIGURE SOME OF THE FLUID MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS.AND THE CLASS A COMMAND LINKS WILL NEED TO BE LOOKED AT AS WELL.

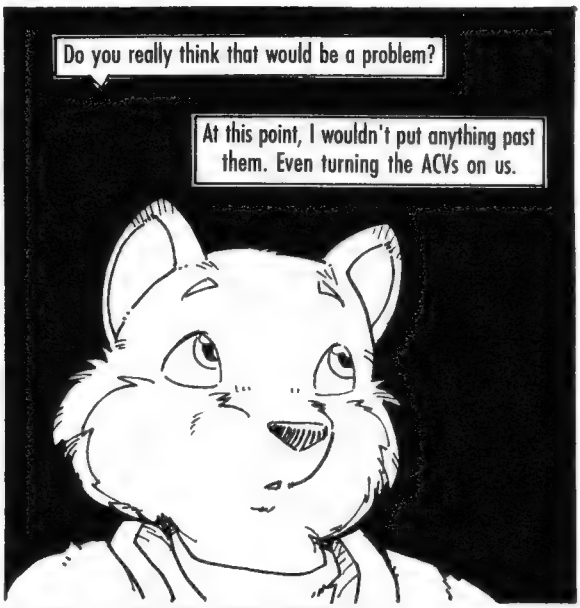
the class A - - ?
the computer knows! and by suggesting it, seems willing to go along with it.

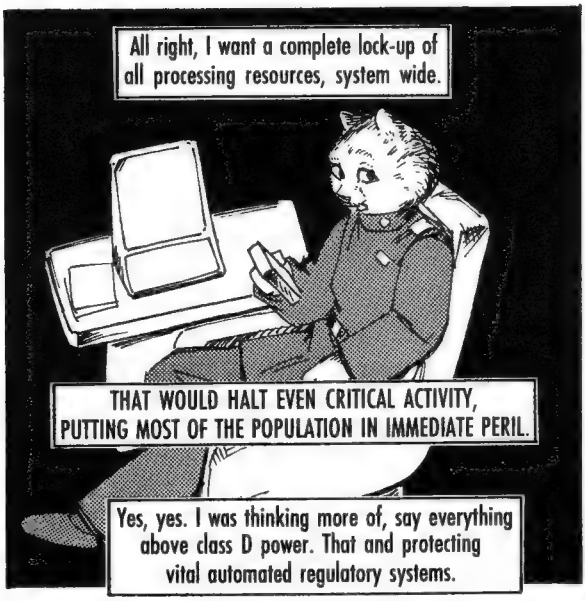

So, what do you want me to do with these panels?
Just tie them down anywhere. At least 10 Gee rig.
Then go through and stow everything that isn't nailed down as best you can.
Don't worry about the open works. If we're lucky, we can come back in half an hour and undo all this. We're going to have one wild ride, and we don't have much time to prep for it.
Any news about Annahport?
There's still an airborne feed on channel 3.
They're showing some survivors -- but there's still no useful info on the ground.
At least they didn't get hit like Dursahn or Kayor.
Yes, there is that.
EF376

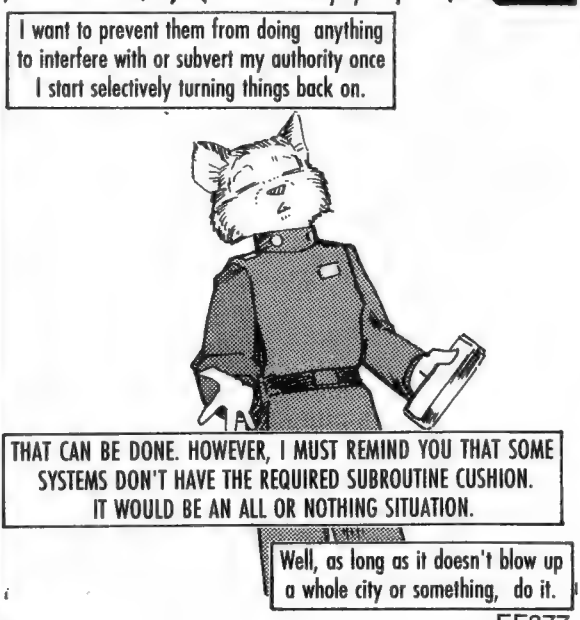

We're getting a track on the last of the hostiles.
There are four ACVs we can route in to intercept.

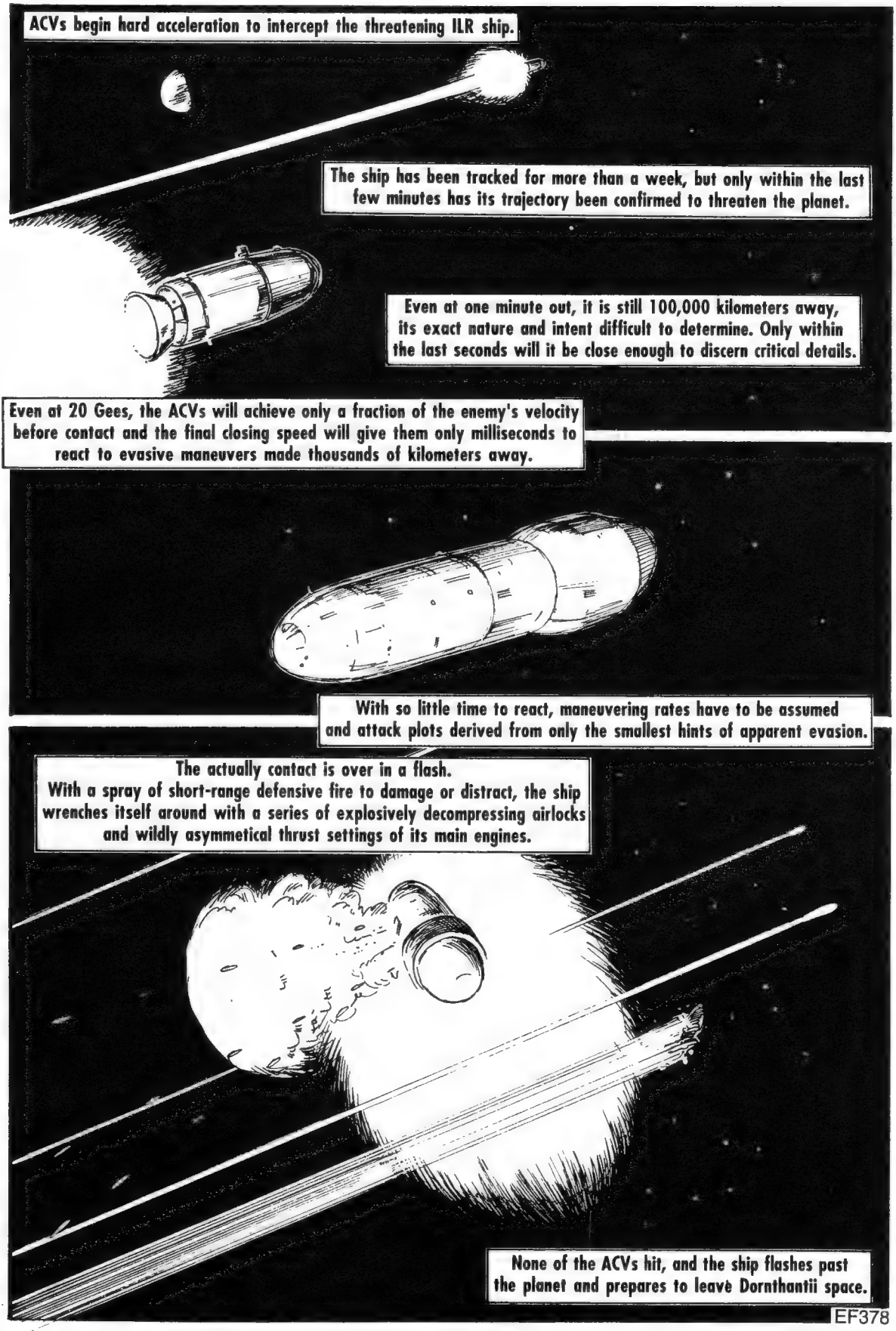
Looks like it. Commit them to the intercept, but get some of the far side units moving. There's always a chance of some more hostiles jumping in.
Yeah, I've got it.

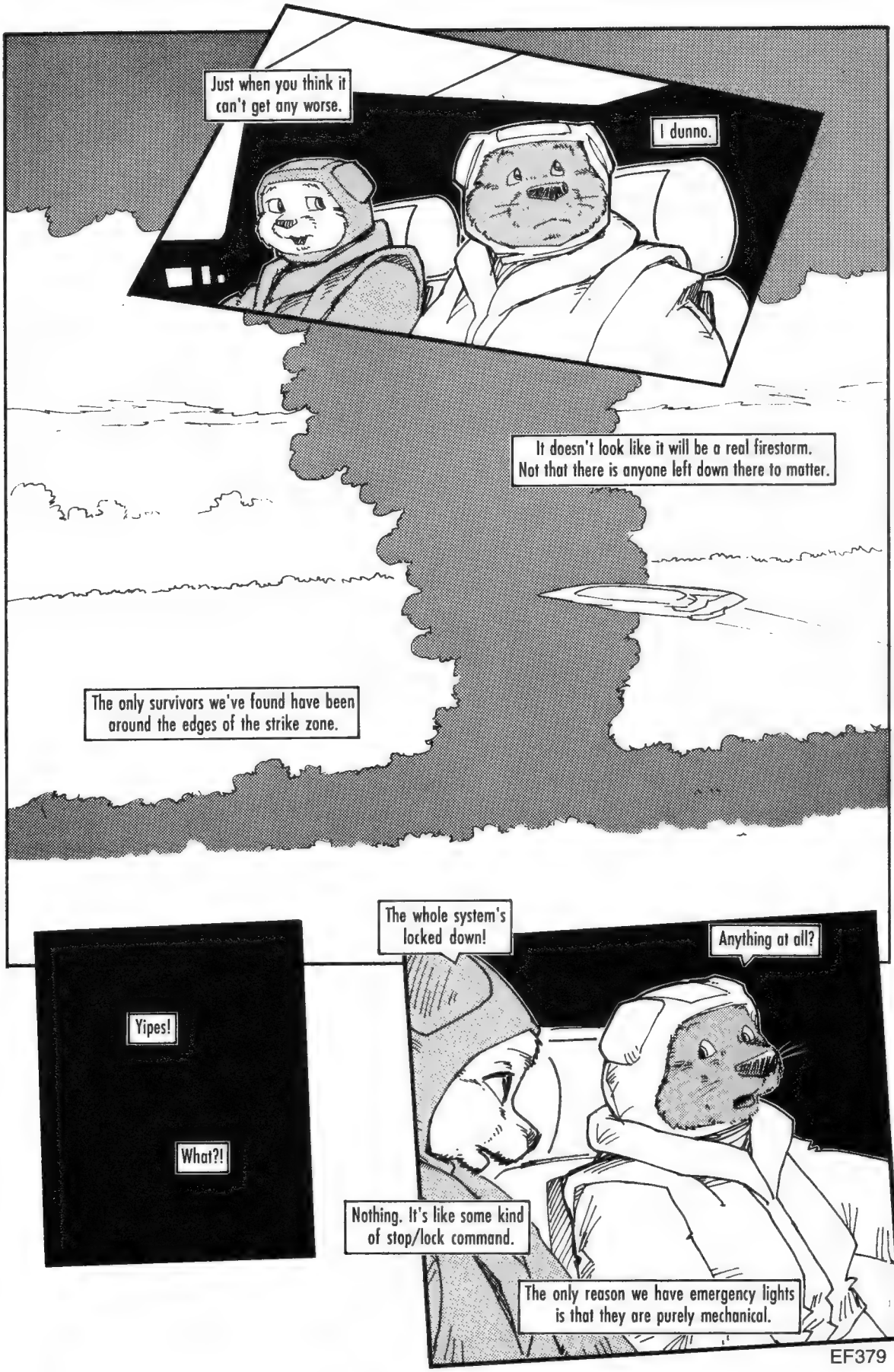
And to play it safe, give them full autonomous operation. That way, they can't be interfered with.

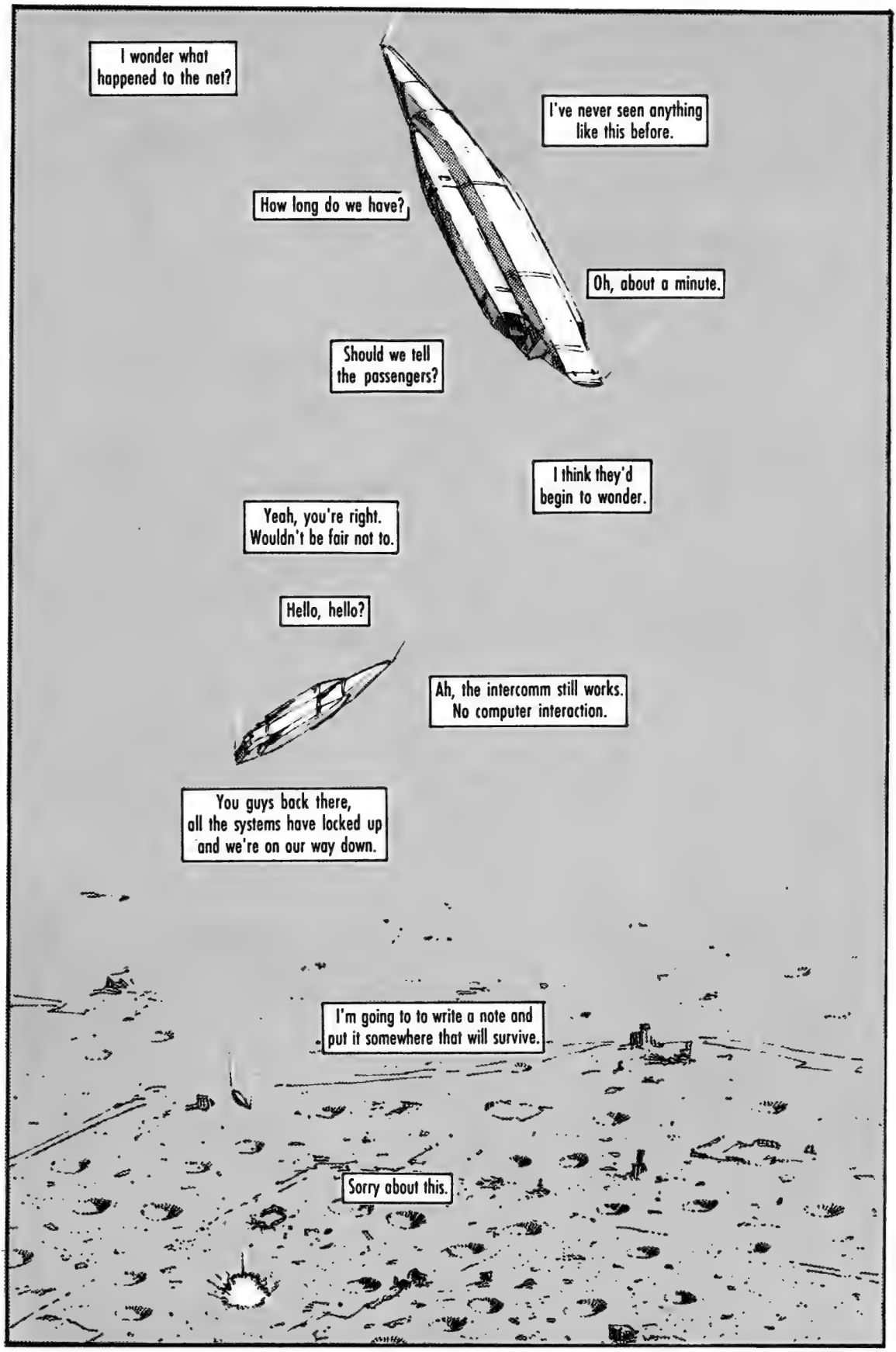

Do you really think that would be a problem?
At this point, I wouldn't put anything past them. Even turning the ACVs on us.


All right, I want a complete lock-up of all processing resources, system wide.
THAT WOULD HALT EVEN CRITICAL ACTIVITY, PUTTING MOST OF THE POPULATION IN IMMEDIATE PERIL.
Yes, yes. I was thinking more of, say everything above class D power. That and protecting vital automated regulatory systems.


I want to prevent them from doing anything to interfere with or subvert my authority once I start selectively turning things back on.
THAT CAN BE DONE. HOWEVER, I MUST REMIND YOU THAT SOME SYSTEMS DON'T HAVE THE REQUIRED SUBROUTINE CUSHION. IT WOULD BE AN ALL OR NOTHING SITUATION.
Well, as long as it doesn't blow up a whole city or something, do it.


ACVs begin hard acceleration to intercept the threatening ILR ship.
The ship has been tracked for more than a week, but only within the last few minutes has its trajectory been confirmed to threaten the planet.
Even at one minute out, it is still 100,000 kilometers away, its exact nature and intent difficult to determine. Only within the last seconds will it be close enough to discern critical details.
Even at 20 Gees, the ACVs will achieve only a fraction of the enemy's velocity before contact and the final closing speed will give them only milliseconds to react to evasive maneuvers made thousands of kilometers away.
With so little time to react, maneuvering rates have to be assumed and attack plots derived from only the smallest hints of apparent evasion.
The actually contact is over in a flash.
With a spray of short-range defensive fire to damage or distract, the ship wrenches itself around with a series of explosively decompressing airlocks and wildly asymmetical thrust settings of its main engines.
None of the ACVs hit, and the ship flashes past the planet and prepares to leave Dornthantii space.


Just when you think it can't get any worse.
I dunno.
It doesn't look like it will be a real firestorm. Not that there is anyone left down there to matter.
The only survivors we've found have been around the edges of the strike zone.
Yipes!
What?!
The whole system's locked down!
Anything at all?
Nothing. It's like some kind of stop/lock command.
The only reason we have emergency lights is that they are purely mechanical.


I wonder what happened to the net?
I've never seen anything like this before.
How long do we have?
Oh, about a minute.
Should we tell the passengers?
I think they'd begin to wonder.
Yeah, you're right. Wouldn't be fair not to.
Hello, hello?
Ah, the intercomm still works. No computer interaction.
You guys back there, all the systems have locked up and we're on our way down.
I'm going to to write a note and put it somewhere that will survive.
Sorry about this.

The net's down.

What?

Are you sure we're not just cut off?

And what about that last ship?

Don't know, the whole system is gone.

Can we get landline and direct-beam comm going? Even without the processors, we need to maintain at least some communication.

Can't do much of that either. There is some kind of lock-down instruction that keeps the general comm equipment from working.

We have some dedicated transmitters that are unaffected, but there's almost nothing in the field that doesn't double as a processor terminal, and that's what's been locked down.

Can't we try some kind of purge and reset on anything?

I can't even turn my terminal off.

Everything smarter than a watch has this damn lock-down virus or whatever it is, including all the diagnostic tools.

And even if we can clear something, not knowing what the problem is, we'd likely reinfect it as soon as we try to use it.

Could this be a weapon?

Could the ILR have set it up beforehand and is now letting it go?

Nothing is impossible. But the system was designed against anything like that.

To hit everything like this would need something that was based on the fundamental security architecture to start with, and ***that*** is impossible.

Or is it?

What? You mean someone at the very highest levels did this? Did this to us?

I'm afraid so. I've already made mention of the Abennea EDF Command messing with things. Now I'd guess that since they can't have control, they won't let anyone else have control either.

So we need to get a message out to loyal units to arrest the command heads, especially Ikalik, Durboa, Vonnlit, and their immediate staff. As long as they're loose, they can raise all manner of havoc.

How's everything holding up?

We're doing fine now.

With these unlinked handsets, we have a pretty good handle on our survivors' registry.

The organization of food and shelter has helped immeasurably.

the survivors now at least have a chance.

I can't believe Tavas wouldn't have a better response to all this.

the bunny!

no!

all these dead. what a nightmare for the families.

he wasn't all that badly hurt, just a little concussion!

he should have made it! it's not fair!

Tasak?

The net is back up. The EDF out of Abennea say they are in control now.

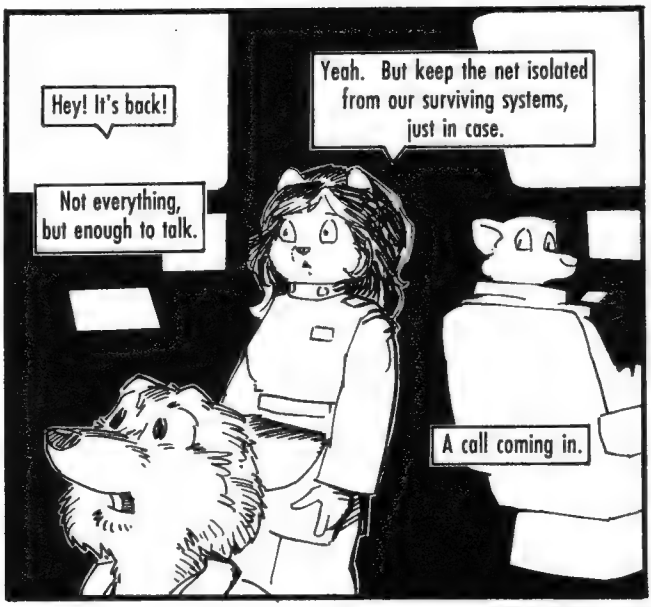
Also say a renegade group had boogered the defenses and attempted a takeover.

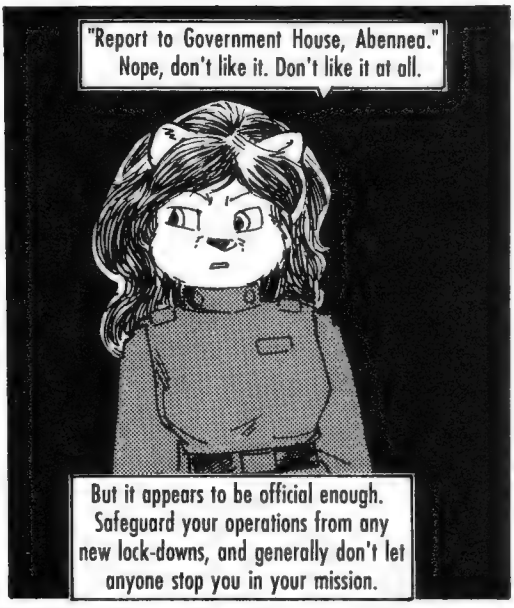
A Commander Felna and some dubious government types.

Yeah, that would be my office.

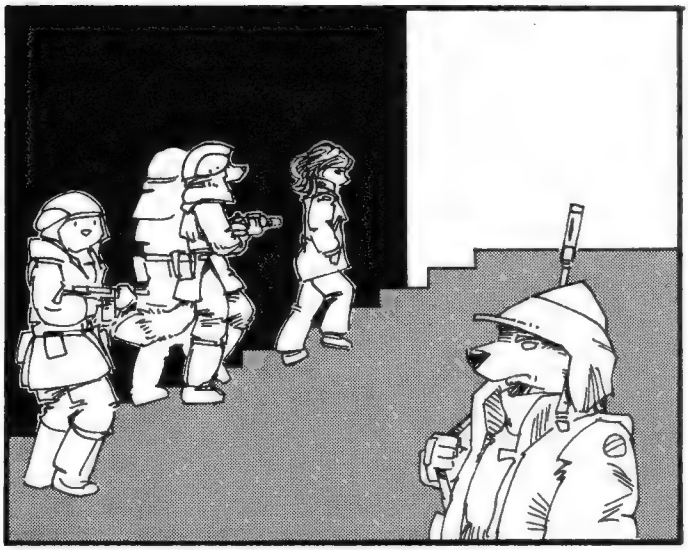
What?!

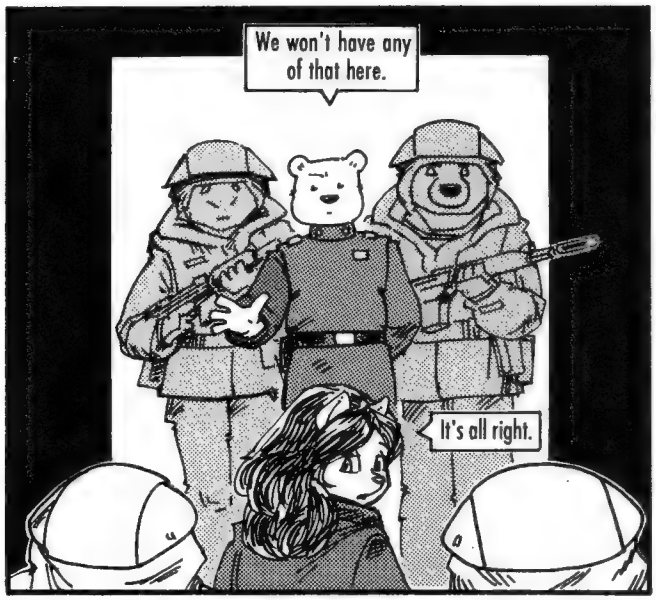
he didn't? he couldn't ! he's responsible!!


Hey! It's back!
Yeah. But keep the net isolated from our surviving systems, just in case.
Not everything, but enough to talk.
A call coming in.


"Report to Government House, Abennea." Nope, don't like it. Don't like it at all.
But it appears to be official enough. Safeguard your operations from any new lock-downs, and generally don't let anyone stop you in your mission.

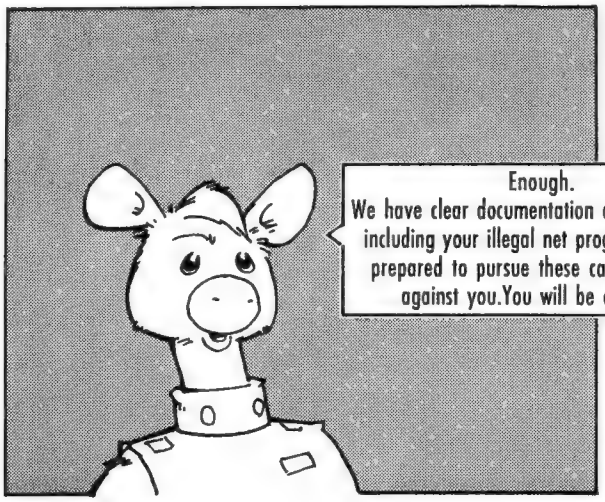
Now we get to see what's up.
I'll need an armed squad, just to be sure.

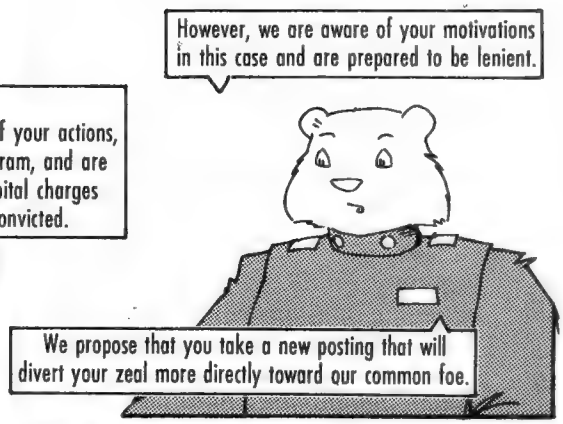


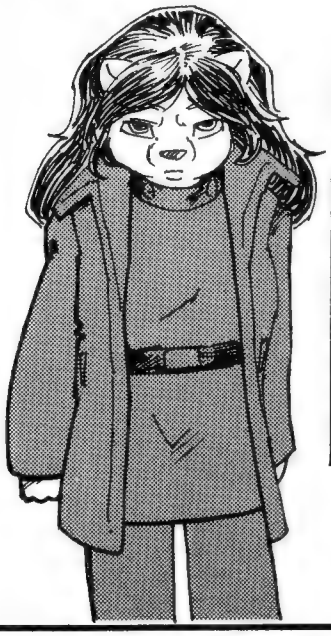

We won't have any of that here.
It's all right.

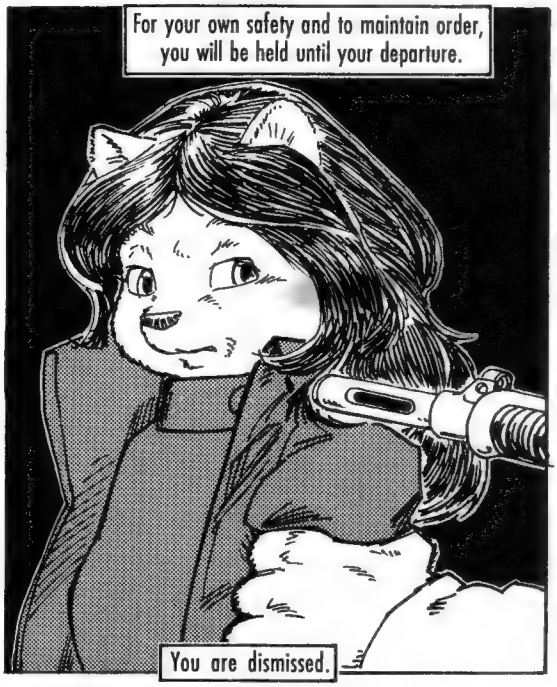
It is well that you have come peacefully.
Peacefully? The conspirators have been secured, haven't they?

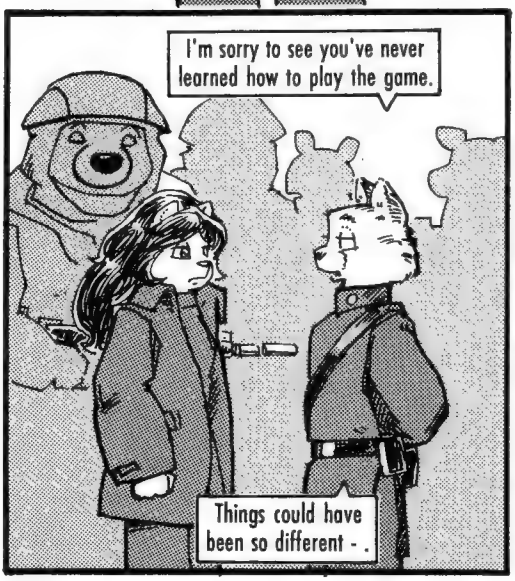
Officer Felna? Are you prepared to face the charges against you?
Charges?
It's these officers who should be up on charges.
So you do have a defense. You have been accused of criminally usurping command authority in the face of the enemy. Further, you interfered in the administration of relief services to stricken populations who have suffered the consequences of your initial crimes.
Under EDF code 28, I submit that these proceedings are suspect, and that an independent board be assembled to review the charges and evidence.
I'm sorry, Officer Felna, but the evidence against you is incontrovertible. All surviving records will clearly -- .
They have a data tool that can make it all up!
Your use of a criminal program is also recorded.


Enough.
We have clear documentation of your actions, including your illegal net program, and are prepared to pursue these capital charges against you.You will be convicted.


However, we are aware of your motivations in this case and are prepared to be lenient.
We propose that you take a new posting that will divert your zeal more directly toward our common foe.

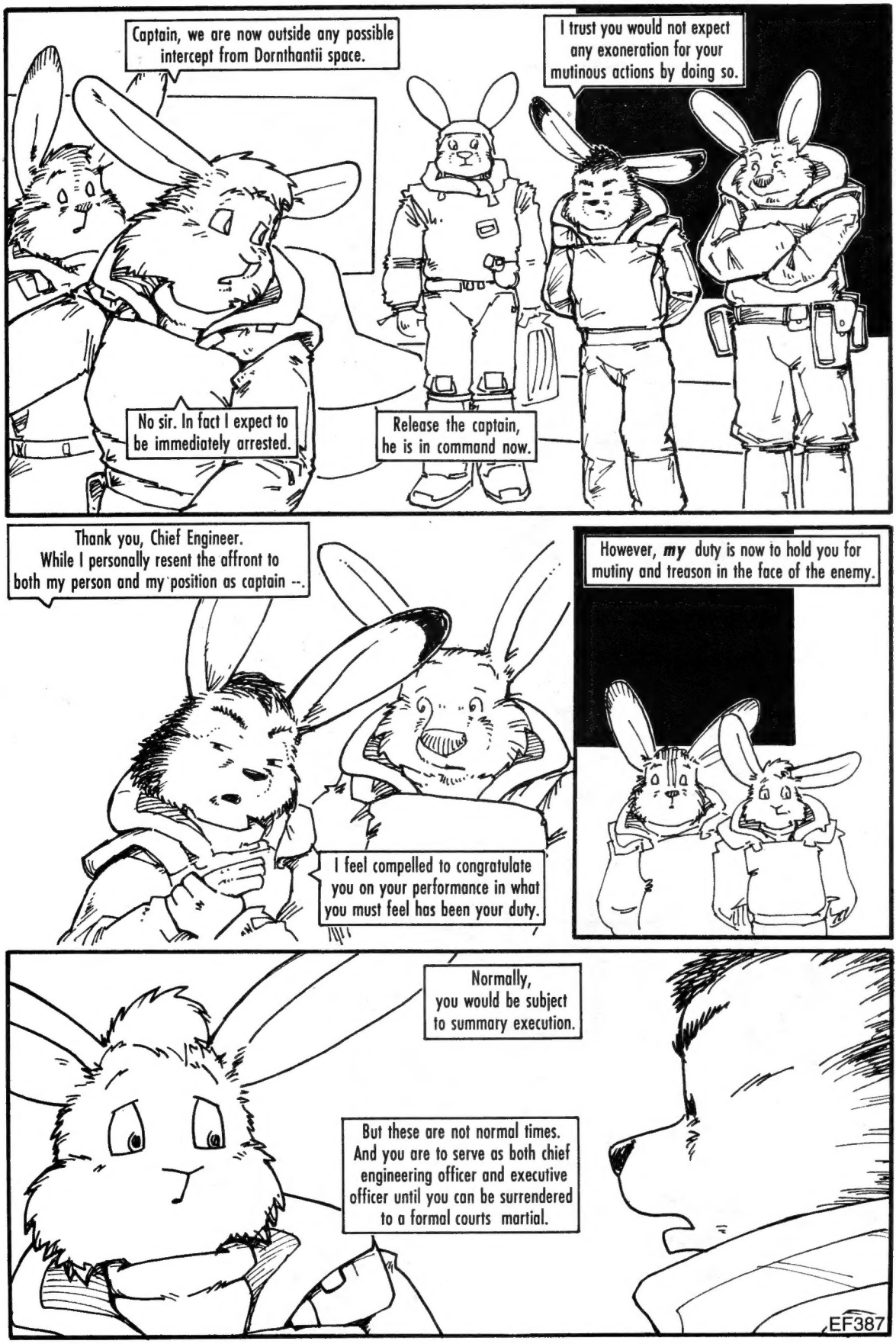

The DH 588 will be availablefor your command in a few days to seek out and engage ILR forces currently threatening Confed space.
We trust you will see your duty and use this opportunity to rehabilitate your otherwise exemplary record.


For your own safety and to maintain order, you will be held until your departure.
You are dismissed.


I'm sorry to see you've never learned how to play the game.
Things could have been so different - .

I suspect I have you to thank for my new assignment.
But all I know for sure at this instant is that you killed my son.

They're not dispersing.
No. They don't want to leave their homes or loved ones.
No, it wasn't a question. This is not going to easily fade from memory.
We could force relocation; practical safety and hygiene issues may make it necessary anyway.
Just be careful -
Hey! Look out! Get 'em!
You killed them! You killed them all, you bloody bastard!
Hold off there. Tasak?
Ya gonna kill me too? You got what you wanted?
Tasak, you're doing a good job here, helping a lot of people.
Don't spoil it for them with ill-considered outbursts.
Let him go.
Is that entirely wise? Or are you just getting soft?
Are you kidding?
As I was trying to say, we've got a lot of blood on our hands and the survivors are not going to let us forget it. So if we want to hold on to what we have, we're going to have to make sure they don't have any reason to hate us any more than they already do. Besides, levels of suppression usually match the weakness rather than the strength of the state. So ignoring him is a better show of strength than prosecuting him.


Captain, we are now outside any possible intercept from Dornthantii space.
I trust you would not expect any exoneration for your mutinous actions by doing so.
No sir. In fact I expect to be immediately arrested.
Release the captain, he is in command now.
Thank you, Chief Engineer. While I personally resent the affront to both my person and my position as captain --.
However, my duty is now to hold you for mutiny and treason in the face of the enemy.
I feel compelled to congratulate you on your performance in what you must feel has been your duty.
Normally, you would be subject to summary execution.
But these are not normal times. And you are to serve as both chief engineering officer and executive officer until you can be surrendered to a formal courts martial.
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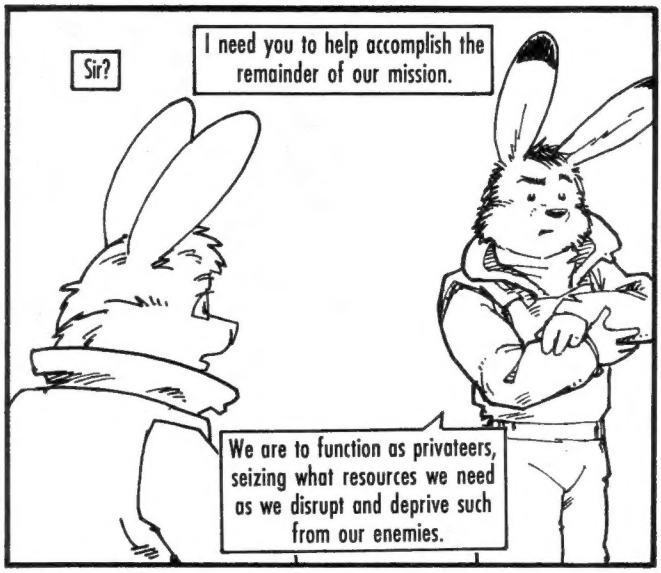
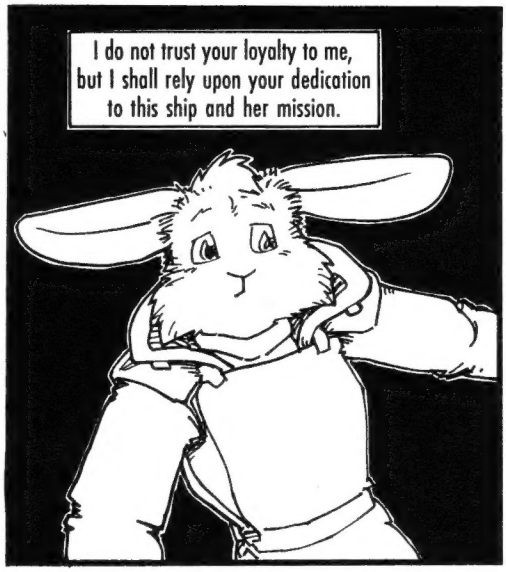
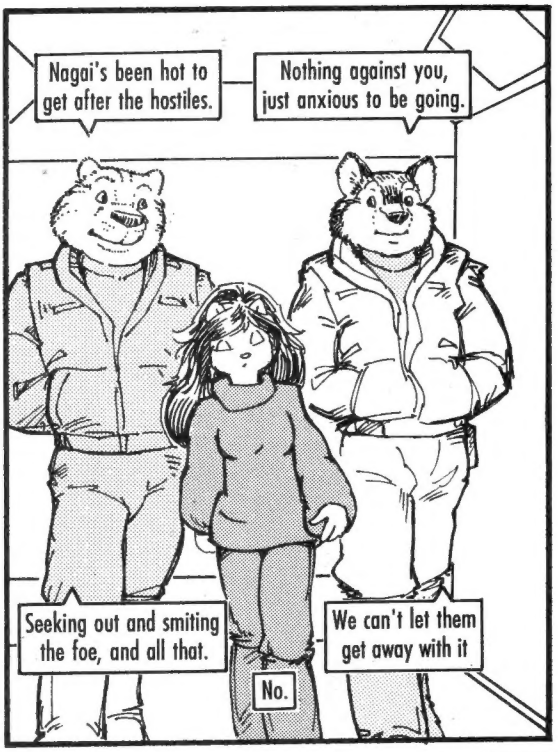

Sir?
I need you to help accomplish the remainder of our mission.
We are to function as privateers, seizing what resources we need as we disrupt and deprive such from our enemies.


I do not trust your loyalty to me, but I shall rely upon your dedication to this ship and her mission.

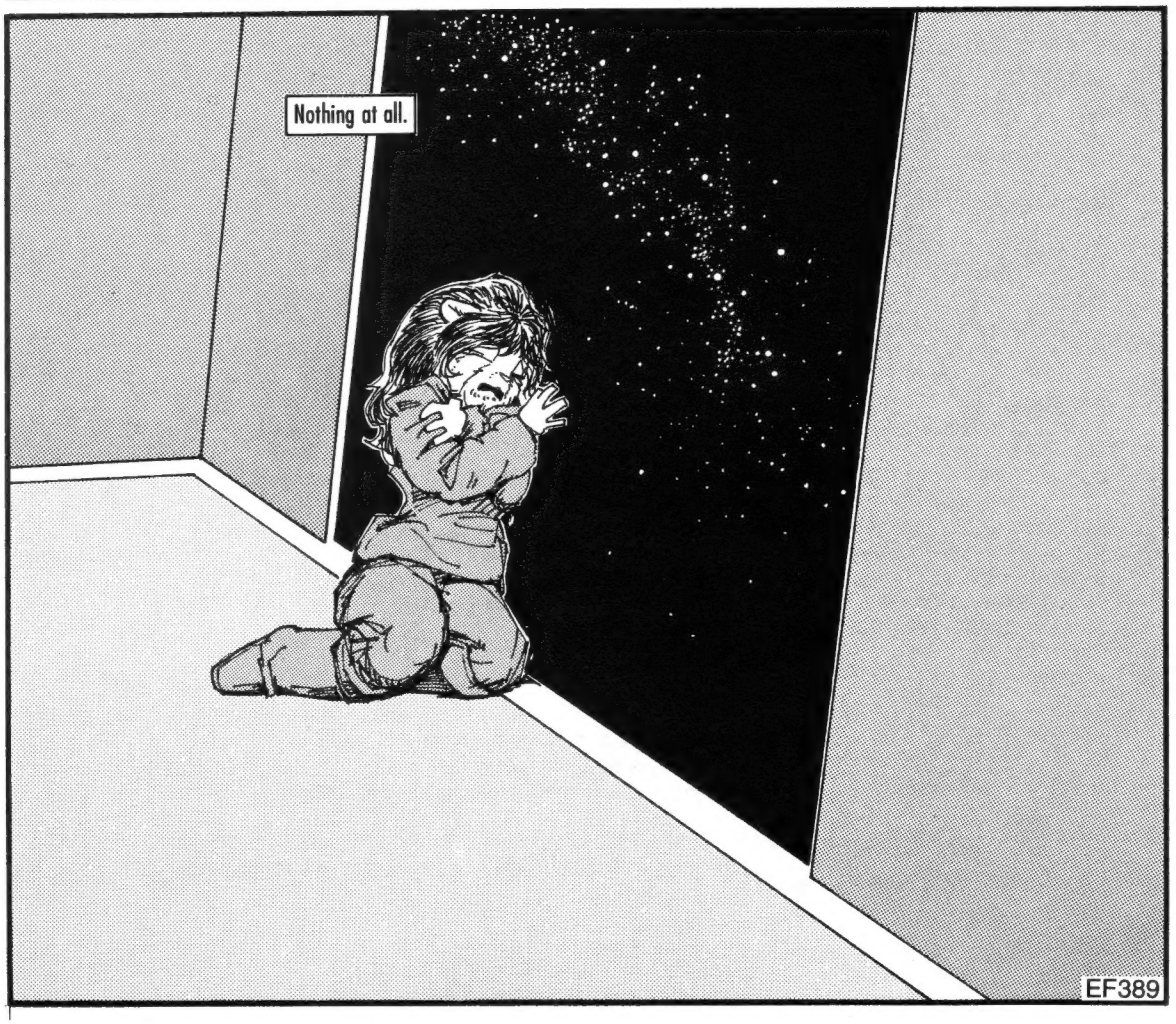
armed escorts?
dunno.
this could get interesting.

Here are your orders and release documents for the prisoner.
Received and acknowledged.

You two, see the captain to her quarters.
Tabek, signal that we'll be thrusting immediately.
But --
Moveit!


Nagai's been hot to get after the hostiles.
Nothing against you, just anxious to be going.
Seeking out and smiting the foe, and all that.
No.
We can't let them get away with it

Heard things were rough down side.
Yes -- it was -- difficult.
Is there anything?
Thank you, no. Nothing.


Nothing at all.